

Office of Attorney General Terry Goddard



STATE OF ARIZONA
DEPARTMENT OF LAW
1275 W. WASHINGTON STREET
PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85007-2926
WWW.AZAG.GOV

ANDREA M. ESQUER
PRESS SECRETARY
PHONE: (602) 542-8019
CELL PHONE: (602) 725-2200

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Meth Lab Bust Underscores Need for New Law, Goddard Says

(Phoenix, Ariz. – March 22, 2005) A meth lab bust early this morning at a West Phoenix home, where a 1½ -year-old boy was found in the midst of drug paraphernalia and toxic fumes, tragically illustrates the need for a law making it harder to produce methamphetamine, Attorney General Terry Goddard said.

Inside the home near 104th Avenue and Camelback Road, authorities collected hundreds of empty blister packs that held thousands of over-the-counter decongestant pills. The pills contain pseudoephedrine, the key ingredient used by meth cooks. The meth bill, HB 2175, is supported overwhelmingly by law enforcement leaders throughout Arizona. It would move pseudoephedrine tablets behind the counter, reduce the quantity that could be purchased at one time, and require a photo ID and signature from buyers.

The bill is modeled after a law that took effect last year in Oklahoma, where meth lab seizures have dropped more than 70 percent and meth arrests have declined dramatically. The Oklahoma law's success prompted Arizona and 28 other states to introduce similar legislation.

"Methamphetamine is the No. 1 contributor to crime in Arizona," said Goddard, who joined members of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force at the bust.

"Meth poisons neighborhoods, it poisons children and it's closely connected to a long list of other crimes, including domestic abuse, child neglect, burglary, auto theft, identity theft and counterfeiting."

In the West Phoenix home raided Tuesday, the master bedroom suite was transformed into a meth lab, and toxic residue stained the walls. The large quantity of precursor chemicals and toxic wastes found at the home indicated a substantial amount of meth was being produced.

Joseph Martinez, 39, and Christine Brown, 29, were taken into custody and are being held pending charges being filed.

The federal Drug Enforcement Administration reported that its agents seized 523 kilograms of meth in Arizona last year, an amount second only to California. Goddard said his office prosecuted meth cases involving 103 labs in Arizona in 2004.

Arizona's meth bill, sponsored by Rep. Tom O'Halleran, R-Sedona, has been stuck in the House Appropriations Committee. Several other states, meanwhile, have already passed similar meth bills this year.

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